# The Honor · of the

By JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD. Author of "The Danger Trail"

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### CHAPTER VIII. Renunciation.

T was on the girl's fifteenth birthday. They had come up to the top of the ridge on which he had fought the missionary, to gather red sprigs of the bakneesh for the festival that they were to have in the cabin that night. High up on the face of a jagged rock Jan saw a bit of the crimson vine thrusting itself out into the sun, and, with Melisse laughing and encouraging him from below, he climbed up until he had secured it. He tossed it down to her.

"It's the last one." she cried, seeing his disadvantage, "and I'm going home. You can't catch me."

Jan slackened his steps. It was a joy to see Melisse springing from rock to rock and darting across the thin openings close ahead of him, her hair loosening and sweeping out in the sun. ber siender figure fleeing with the lightness of the pale sun shadows that ran up and down the mountain.

He would not have overtaken her of his own choosing, but at the foot of the ridge Melisse gave up. Never had he seen her so beautiful, still daring him with her laugh, quivering and panting, flinging back her hair. Half reaching out his arms, he cried:

"Melisse, you are beautiful-you are almost's woman! If you did your hair up like the pictures we have in the books you would be a woman," he answered softly. "You are more beautiful than the pictures!"

"You say that I am pretty and that I am almost a woman," she pouted. "and yet"- She sbrugged her shoulders at him in mock disdain. "Jan Thoreau, this is the third time in the last week that you have not played the game right. I won't play with you ony more!"

In a finsh he was at her side, her face between his two hands, and, bending down, he kissed her upon the

"There," she said as he released her. ever since I can remember? Whenever you catch me you may have that."

"I am afraid, Melisse," he said seriously. "You are growing so tall and so pretty that I am afraid."

"Afraid! My brother afraid to kiss me! And what will you do when I get to be a woman, Jan, which will be very soon, you say?"

"I don't know, Melisse." She turned her back to him and flung out her hair, and Jan, who had done this same thing for her a hundred times before, divided the silken mass into three strands and plaited

them into a braid. "I don't believe that you care for me as much as you used to, Jan. I wish I were a woman, so that I might know if you are going to forget me

Her shoulders trembled, and when he had finished his task he found that she was laughing and that her eyes were swimming with a new mischief which she was trying to hide from him. In that laugh there was something which was not like Meltsse. Slight as the change was he noticed it; but, instead of displeasing him, it set a vague sensation of pleasure trilling like a new song within him.

When they reached the post Melisse went to the cabin with her bakneesh and Jan to the company's store, where get, burying it deeper each year, until he met Jean de Gravois. "Blessed saints, man, but is she not

growing more beautiful every day?" said Jean. "Yes," said Jan. "She will soon be a

woman.' "A woman!" shouted Jean, who, not having his caribou whip, jumped up and down to emphasize his words. "She will soon be a woman, did you say, Jan Thoreau? And if she is not a woman at thirty with two children-God send others like them!-when will across the open were Melisse and she be, I ask you?"

"I meant Melisse," laughed Jan. "And I meant lowaka," said Jean. He hopped out like a cricket overburdened with life, calling loudly to his wife, who came to meet him, and say- two men to come to their assistance.

has got for you." The big room was empty when Jan came quietly through the open door. He stopped to listen and caught a faint laugh from the other room and then another, and to give warning of time Jan arrived. his presence he coughed loudly and scraped a chair along the floor. A moment's silence followed. The farther steps behind Jean and his wife. "You man's life at Lac Bain be and Per-ee door opened a little, and then it opened

wide, and Melisse came out. "Now, what do you think of me. brother Jan?"

She stood in the light of the window. through which came the afternoon sun. her hair piled in glistening coils upon the crown of her head as they had seen them in the pictures, her cheeks flushed, her eyes glowing questioningly at

Jan. "You are prettier than I have ever seen you, Melisse," he replied softly.

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21 hone to have you this me oud not I have to make you do it that it has estime every morning when as goes to the store. I remember a henyou used to less me every time you gave home, but now you forget to do t at all 11 brothers boxe their sisters less as they grow older?"

"Sometimes they love the sister less and the other girl more Melisse," came a quick voice from the door, and Jean de Gravols hounded in like a playful cat scraping and bowing before Melisse until his head nearly touched the floor, "Lovely saints, Jan Thoreau, but she is a woman, just as my lowaka told me!"

"You're terribly in love, Jean," cried Melisse, laughing until her eyes were wet; "just like some of the people in the books which Jan and I read."

"And I always shall be, my dear." Melisse flung the red shawl over her head, still laughing.

"I will go to see her, Jean." "Well," said Gravois, looking searchingly at Jan when she had left, "shall I give you my best wishes, Jan Thoreau? Does it signify?" "Signify-what?"

The little Frenchman's eyes snapped "Why, when our pretty Cree maiden becomes engaged she puts up her hair for the first time; that is all, my dear

He stopped suddenly, startled into silence by the strange look that had come into the other's face. For a full minute Jan stood as if the power of movement had gone from him.

"No: it-means-nothing," he said finally, speaking as if the words were forced from him one by one. He dropped into a chair beside the table like one whose senses had been dulled by an unexpected blow.

"Jan Thoreau," whispered Jean softly, "have you forgotten that it was I who killed the missioner for you, and that through all of these years Jean de Gravois has never questioned you about the fight on the mountain top? Is there anything Jean de Gravois

He sat down opposite Jan, his thin, eager face propped in his hands, and watched silently unt!! the other lifted his head. Their eyes met, steady, unflinching, and in that look there were the oath and the seal of all that the honor of the big snows held for those

Still without words Jan reached within his breast and drew forth the little

Isn't that the way we have played it roll which he had taken from his violin. One by one he handed the pages over to Jean de Gravois.

> "My God!" said Jean, when he had finished reading. He spoke no other words. White faced, the two men stared, Jan's throat twitching, Gravois' brown fingers crushing the rolls be

> beld. "That was why I tried to kill the missioner," said Jan at last, "And that-that-is why it could not signify that Melisse has done up her bair." He gathered up the papers so that they shot back into the little cylinder shaped roll again.

"I understand," replied Jean in a low voice. "I understand and I praise the blessed Virgin that it was Jean de Gravois who killed the missioner out apon the ice of Lac Bain!"

"But the other," persisted Jan, "the other, which says that I"-

"Stop!" cried Jean sharply. He came around the table and seized Jan's hands in the iron grip of his lithe, brown fingers. "That is something for you to forget. It means nothing-nothing at all, Jan Thoreau! Does any one know but you and me?"

"No one. I intended that some day Melisse and her father should know. but I waited too long. I waited until I was afraid, until the horror of telling her frightened me. I made myself fortoday-on the mountain"-

"And today in this cabin you will forget again, and you will bury it so deep that it will never come back. I am proud of you, Jan Thoreau. I love you, and it is the first time that Jean de Gravois has ever said this to a man. Ah, I hear them coming!"

With an absurd bow in the direction of the laughing voices which they now heard, the melodramatic little Frenchman pulled Jan to the door. Halfway Iowaka carrying a large Indian basket between them and making merry over the task. When they saw Gravois and Jan they set down their burden and waved an invitation for the

"You should be the second happiest "Hurry to the cabin, Jan, and see man in the world, Jan Thoreau." exwhat sort of a birthday gift Melisse claimed Jean. "The first is Jean de rock to rock and from tree to tree un-Gravols!"

He set off like a bolt from a spring spruce which hung out over the pre panting, a full dozen rods behind him. gun in the direction of the two who civitous wall of the ridge, its thick top With a wild halloo he stopped the were waiting for them. He had hoist- beckoning and sighing to the black ed the basket upon his shoulder by the rocks that shot up out of the snow 5(n)

"Are you growing old, too, Jan?" bantered Melisse as she dropped a few come so slowly!"

"I think I'm twenty-nine."

the fun swept from her face, leaving | ple had been given to ber. her blue eyes staring up at him, filled | To it went Jan, the papers still held with a pain which he had never seen in his hand. He had seen a pair of in them before. In a moment he knew | whisky jacks storing food in the butt | not until, they reached the mountain | lisse had risen from the table at the that she had understood him, and he of the tree two or three summers be on which he had fought the mission sound of his approach, and his eyes could have cut out his tongue. Her fore, and now his tingers groped for any did Jan bring his dogs to a walk, quickly passed from her flushed face

the little Melisse," With a face time, and she stood laughing down at "Oh, I beg your pardon. I thought"-Croisset and his wife and both Cum- turned slowly away from the tree. ridge. night's merrymaking in the cabin.

ing and oppressed him more as the speaking.

sat up to smoke a pipe. When he had finished he went to his room. Jan company's store, and after a time he cont. He opened the outer door quiet- Melisse." ly so as not to arouse Mellsse, who had gone to bed half an hour before. As he was about to go out there

ed word:

"Jan!" He turned. Melisse stood in her door. She had not undressed, and her hair was still done up in its soft coils. with the crimson bakneesh shining in it. She came to him hesitatingly until she stood with her two hands upon his arm, gazing into his tense face with that same question in her eyes.

tonight," she whispered. "Tell me "I was pleased with you. Melisse."

"Jan, you were not pleased with me

he replied. He took one of her hands that was clinging to his arm and turned his face to the open night. Countless stars gleamed in the sky, as they had shone on another night fifteen years ago. Suddenly there leaped up from Jan Thoreau's breast a breath that burst from his lips in a low cry:

"Melisse! Melisse! It was just fifteen years ago that I came in through that forest out there, starved and dy ing, and played my violin when your mother died. You were a little baby then, and since that night you have never pleased me more than now."

-He dropped her hand and turned squarely to the door to hide what he knew had come into his face. He heard a soft, heartbroken little sob be hind him

"Jan, dear Jan!" She taughed, flappy and trembling her lins held up to him

"I didn't please con today," she with pered. "I will never do up my hat: again."

He kissed her, and his arms droppen from her shoulders. "Never, never again - until you have diately." forgotten to love me," she repeated

"Good night, Brother Jan!" Across the open, through the thinned | to her room. edge of the black spruce, deeper and deeper into the cold, unquivering life lessness of the forest. Jan went from the door that closed between him and Melisse, her last words still whispering in his ears, the warm touch of her harr on his cheeks and the knowledge of what this day had meant for him swiftly surging upon him, bringing with it a torment which racked him to

He went on until he came to where the beaten trail swept up and away from a swamp. He plunged into it, picking his tangled way until he stood upon a giant ridge, from which he looked out through the white night into the limitless barrens to the north

She was no longer the little Melisse his sister, he thought. And yet-He was almost saying her last words I toward the store.

"Good night, Brother Jan" She had come to him that day to let im kiss her as she had come to him : housand times before, but he had not kissed her in the old way to was a different love that his lips had given. and even now the hot blood surged her cap. again into his face as he thought of what he had done. In that which had stirred his blood, thrilling him with strange joy as he held her in his arms. he saw more than the shadow of sinsacrilege against a thing which was more precious to him than life.

### CHAPTER IX.

The New Agent and His Son.

TAN thrust a hand inside his coat and clutched at the papers that Jean de Gravois had read Then he drew them forth slowly and held them crampled in his tagers. while for many minutes he stared birthday." straight out into the gray gloom of the

His eyes shifted. They went from as happy as Jean and Iowaka!" til at last they rested upon a giant ed on the dogs in a spurt that left her feet below. Makee had told Jan its story. In the first autumn of the wo

had climbed the old spruce, lopping off its branches until only the black cap

him, her face lifted pleadingly, the in the papers crowded them down ran quickly to his side.

dear Jan, forgive me! Today is your gently in French as if he were speak- eyes and yours-and we will always have it is the honor of these snows; it is what Panting and breathless. Jan pursued Jan was glad when the evening that Jan Thoreau will never to wrong too great for him to overcome this reau." and Iowaka had said good night with white and set in its determination he him when he came to the top of the He turned inquiringly to Melisse. The

mins and Melisse had gone to their. When he came into the cabin for "You're as pretty as a fairy, Me- gan to gather up the dishes. rooms did be find himself relieved of breakfast next morning Jan's face lisse," be exclaimed, his eyes shining | "We are of no relation," continued the tension under which he had strug- showed signs of the struggle through with admiration. "I'rettier than the Jan, something impelling him to speak gled during all of his playing and that which he had gone. Cumprins had all fairy in the book!" ready finished, and he found Melisse! "Thank you, brother mine! I be-From the first he knew that his alone. Her hair was brushed back in lieve you do still leve me a little." nerves were strung by some strange its old, smooth way, and when she "More than ever in my life," replied and indefinable sensation that was heard him she flung her long braid Jan quickly, though he tried to hold growing within him-something which over her shoulder, so that it fell down his tongue. he could hardly have explained at first, in front of her. He saw the move- As they went on to Ledog's he found but which swiftly took form and mean- ment, and smiled his thanks without that the joyousness of the morning

eves are bloodshot."

was now sleeping in a room at the ted, trying to appear cheerful, "but this his steps beside the sledge,

Brother Jan?" she asked. busy with his trap lines to come in." "Will you take me?"



SORERS. He Thrust In the Papers, Crowded Them Down and Filled the Hole With Chunks of Bark.

"I'm afraid not, Melisse, It's a twelve mile run and a heavy load." . "Very well. I'll get ready imme-

She jumped up from the table, darting fun at him with her eyes, and ran "It's too far, Melisse," he called after her. "It's too far, and I've a heavy

loal"-"Didn't I take that twenty mile run with you over to- Oh, dear! Jan. have you seen my new lynx skin cap?" "It's out here, hanging on the walf," replied Jan, falling into her humor despite himself. "But I say, Melisse"-"Are the dogs ready?" she called.

"If they're not I'll be dressed before you can harness them, Jan." "They'll be here within fifteen min-Ites," he replied, surrendering to her. Her merry face, laughing triumph at him through the partly open door, destroyed the last vestige of his opposition, and he left her with something of his old cheeriness of manner, whis-

tling a gay forest tune as he hurried When he returned with the team Me lisse was waiting for him, a gray thing of silvery lynx fur, with her cheeks. lips and eyes aglow, her trim little feet clad in soft caribon boots that came to her knees, and with a bunch of the brilliant bakneesh fastened jauntily in

"I've made room for you." he said in greeting, pointing to the sledge. "Which I'm not going to fill for five miles at least," declared Melisse, "Isn't it a glorious morning, Jan? I

feel as if I can run from here to Ledog's!" With a crack of his whip and a shout, Jan swung the dogs across the open, with Melisse running lightly at his side. From their cabin Jean and

lowaka called out shrill adieus. "The day is not far off when they two will be as you and I, my lowaka." said Jean in his poetic Cree. "I wager you that it will be before her next

And Melisse was saying: "I wonder if there are many people

team and waited.

"That's unfair, Jan! You'll have to put me on the sledge."

He tucked her in among the furs, and the dogs strained at their traces, with Jan's whip curling and snapping over their backs, until they were leap-He looked at her steadily, the grief remained, and after that it was known of motion over the smooth trail. Then ing swiftly and with unbroken rhythm which he was fighting to keep back far and wide as the "lobstick" of Cum- | Jan gathered in his whip and ran close tightening the muscles about his mins wife. It was a voiceless ceno- to the leader, his moccasined feet taktaph which signified that all the honor ing the short, quick, light steps of the the open to Cummins' cabin. As he row." Like the quick passing of sunshine and love known to the wilderness peo- trained forest runner, his chest thrown paused for an instant at the door he a little out, his eyes upon the twist- heard a laugh that was strange to him, ing trail ahead.

was giving way again to the old gloom "You don't look well, Jan," she said and heartache. "Brother Jan, Brother After the others had gone Cummins anxiously. "You are pale, and your Jan, Brother Jan!" The words pounded themselves incessantly in his brain "I am not feeling right," he admit- until they seemed to keep time with

coffee will make a new man of me. Ledon was stripping the hair fat rose silently to take down his cap and | You make the best coffee in the world, | from a fox skin when the team pulled one in front of his cabin. When he "What are you going to do today, saw the daughter of the factor at Lac Bain with Jan he jumped briskly to "Drive out on the Churchill trail. his feet, flung his cap through the door came a sound, a low, gentle, whisper- | Ledoq wants supplies, and he's too of the shack and began bowing and scraping to ber with all his might.

> Melisse laughed merrily as Ledoq continued to bow before her, rattling away in a delighted torrent of French "Ah, thes ees wan gr-r-reat compleeman, M'selle Melisse," he said. Then he turned to Jan. "Did you meet the strange team?"

> "We met no team." Ledoq looked puzzled. Half a mile away the top of a snow covered ridge was visible from the cabin. He pointed to It.

"An hour ago I saw it going westward along the mountain-three men and six dogs. Whom have you out from Lac Bain?"

"No one," replied Jan. "It must have been the new agent from Churchill. We expect him early this winter, Shall we hurry back, Melisse, and see if he has brought our books and violin | come to be like brother and sister."

"You must have dinner with me," hiected Ledou

Jan caught a quick signal from Me-"Not today, Ledoq. It's early and we have a lunch for the trail. What

do von sav. Melisse?" "If you're not tired, Jan."

"Tired." He tossed the last package from the sledge and cracked his long whip over the dogs' backs as they both cried out their farewell to the little Frenchman "Tired" he repeated, running close peside her as the team swung lightly back into the trait and laughing down into her face "How could I ever get freed with year beatening me rub, Me-

"I wouldn't spind if you did-just a initie, Jan isn't there room for two?" She gave a connectish little shrug of her shoulders, and Jan leaped upon the moving sledge, kneeling close behind

"Always, always, I have to ask you!" she ponted "You needn't get too near, you know, if you don't want to." The old, sweet challenge in her voice

was irresistible, and for a moment Jan telt himself surrendering to it. He teaned forward until his chin was buried in the silken lynx fur of her coat, and for a single breath he felt the soft touch of her cheek against his own. Then he gave a sudden shout to the dogs-so loud that it startled herand his whip writhed and snapped twenty feet above their beads like a thing filled with life.

He sprang from the sledge and again ran with the team, urging them on faster and faster until they dropped into a panting walk when they came to the ridge along which Ledoq two hours before had seen the strangers hurrying toward Lac Bain.

They did not lunch on the trail, but drove into the post in time for dinner. Jean de Gravois and Croisset came

forth from the store to meet them. "You have company, my dear," cried Jean to Melisse - "two gentlemen fresh from London on the last boat and one of them younger and handsomer than your own Jan Thoreau. They are waiting for you in the cabin, where your father is getting them dinner and telling them how beautifully you would have made the coffee if you

were there." "Two!" said Jan as Melisse left them.

"Who are they?" "The new agent, M. Timothy Dixon, as red as the plague, and fatter than a spawning fish. And his son, who has come along for fun, he says; and I believe he will get what he's after if he remains here very long, Jan Thoreau, for he looked a little too boldly at my Iowaka when she came into the

store just now." "Can you blame him, Jean? I tell you that I look at Iowaka whenever I get the chance."

"Is she not worth it?" cried Jean in rapture. "You are welcome to every look that you can get, Jan Thoreau. But the foreigner-I will skin him alive and spit him with the devil thorn if he so much as peeps at her out of the wrong way of his eye."

Croisset shrugged his shoulders. "There are two of the foreigners at Nelson House, and two on the Wholdaia, and one"-

and when he opened it to enter be las a bear Mile after mile slipped behind, and stood perplexed and undecided. Me-

hand reached his arm, and she stopped by when he found it he thrust. Melisse jumped from the sledge and to the young man who was sitting opposite ber. He caught a nervous trem-

"Forgive me," she whispered, her "Always my sister, and never any, she cried. "If you catch me"- There | "Mr. Dixon, this is my brother, Jan." voice breaking into a sob. "Dear, thing more to Jan Thoreau," he said was the old witching challenge in her The stranger jumped to his feet and held out a hand.

birthday, Jan-yours and mine, mine ing to a spirit in the old tree. "That | She sped up the side of the ridge. "I'm glad to know you, Cummins." "Thoreau," corrected Jan quietly, as the great God means us to be I swear with the dogs. Her advantage was he took the extended hand. "Jan Tho-

flush deepened in her cheeks as she be-



"Mr. Dixon, this is my brother, Jan."

the words with cool precision. "Only we have lived under the same roof since she was a baby, and so we have "Miss Melisse has been telling me about your run this morning," ex-

claimed the young Englishman, his face reddening slightly as he detected the girl's embarrassment. "I wish I business confidential had seen it." "There will be plenty of it very soon," replied Jan, caught by the frankness of the other's manner. "Our

runners will be going out among the trappers within a fortnight." "And will they take me?" "You may go with me if you can run.

"Thanks," said Dixon, moving toward the door. Methase did not lift her head as he went out Faintly she said:

leave the day after tomorrow."

"I've kept your dinner for you, Jan. Why didn't you come sooner?" "I had dinner with Gravois," I- replied. "Jean said that you would

I accepted his invitation." He took down from the wall a fur sledge coat, in which Melisse had mended a rent a day or two before, and, throwing it over his arm, turned to leave.

hardly be prepared for five, Melisse, so

"Jan!" He faced her slowly, knowing that in spite of himself there was a strangeness in his manner which she would

"Why are you going away the day ifter tomorrow-two weeks before the others? You didn't tell me." "I'm going a hundred miles into the

south," he answered. "Over the Nelson House trail?"

"Yes." "Oh!" Her lips curled slightly as she looked at him. Then she laughed, and a bright spot leaped into either cheek. "I understand, brother," she said softly. "Pardon me for questioning" you so. I had forgotten that the Mac Veigh girl lives on the Nelson trail. Iowaka says that she is as sweet as a wild flow-

er. I wish you would have her come up and visit us some time, Jan." Jan's face went red, then white, but Melisse saw only the first effect of her random shot and was briskly gathering

up the dishes. "I turn off into the Cree lake country before I reach MacVeigh's," he was on the point of saying, but the words hung

upon his lips, and he remained si'ent. A few minutes later he was talling with Jean de Gravois. The little Frenchman's face was ominously dark and he puffed furiously upon his pipe when Jan told him why he was leaving at once for the south.

"Running away!" he repeated for the tenth time in French, his thin his curl ing in a sneet. "I am sorry that I gave you my eath, Jan Thorean, else I would go myself and tell Mellsse what I read in the papers. Pish: Why can't you "I may-some day," said Jan "That

is why I am going into the south two weeks early, and I shall be gone untiafter the big roast. If I remain tiere another week I shall tell Melisse, and then -

He shrugged his shoulders despair ingly.

"And then what," "I should go away forever" Jean snapped his fingers with a low

"Then remain another week Jan Thoreau, and if it turns out as you say I swear I will alamies my two Iowakas and little Jean to the wo'xes." An hour later Jan went slowly across | "I am going the day after today

> The next morning Iowaka complained to Melisso that Gravois was as suri-

> > (Continued Next Saturday)

can be secured from the Star-Bulletin | brought back from Europe.

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